



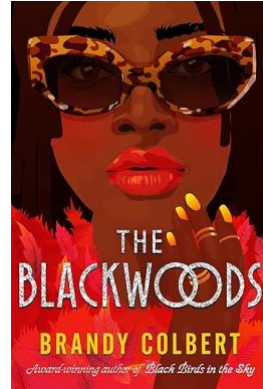
The Blackwoods

Written by Brandy Colbert

Grades 9-12

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Reading Guide by Jennifer Silver, L.A. Conservancy Volunteer

Discussion Questions

1. Near the end of the book, great-granddaughter Ardis Blackwood observes, “They weren’t perfect - they were family” (page 367). Describe the narrative impact of this multigenerational narrative. How did the characters collectively paint a picture of their family’s Hollywood legacy?
2. What lessons about fame and its varying effects on mental health can we learn from Hollis and Ardith?
3. The media’s invasiveness is a constant point of concern for members of the modern Blackwood family. Do you think this is particular to Los Angeles entertainment culture, or does it point to a larger, more universal concern? Explain.
4. Blossom Blackwood broke barriers as a Black Hollywood actress in the 1960s. Trace her journey. Then, compare or contrast her experiences with current trailblazing performers of color.
5. If you could interview any members of the Blackwood family about their experiences in Hollywood, who would you choose to talk to and what would you ask them?
6. On page 301, the author observes, “[Blossom] knew that, at her age, the clock was ticking on her career...her talent agent suggested she lie about her age if she was called back for a screen test.” To what extent does age factor into our judgements about a person’s talent, capacity, and/or value?



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7. Consider the question on the book's back cover: "Can you love someone and not completely trust them?" How does this question center the conflicts, scandals, and secrets of the Blackwood family? What is your own response to the cover's query?

Extension Activities

1. Los Angeles' historic landmarks and its dynamic entertainment industry serve as an engaging backdrop on the characters' lives, almost like a movie set. Trace and/or note some of these landmarks as they occur. Then, take a virtual tour (or take a walking tour with the L.A. Conservancy!) to learn more.
2. Author Brandy Colbert cites the book *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams* by David Bogle as critical to her nonfiction research for *The Blackwoods*. The book is widely available at local libraries and bookstores. Secure a copy and browse its contents. Then, write your own short story of Black Hollywood based on your perusal. Alternatively, examine the memoirs of Diahann Carroll (*The Legs Are the Last to Go*) or Cecily Tyson (*Just As I Am*) for further personal perspectives.
3. In her *Author's Note*, Colbert wonders why groundbreaking sitcoms like *Julia* were not regularly rotated on television networks during her childhood. Consider additional shows featuring predominantly Black casts. After watching a few episodes of a series, design a publicity campaign for the show. You may wish to include both digital and print media.

